



U.S. Immigration
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News Release

MAN SENTENCED TO 40 YEARS FOR ABDUCTING ILLEGAL ALIENS FROM 'DROP HOUSES' AND HOLDING THEM FOR RANSOM

LOS ANGELES – A man convicted of stealing illegal aliens from a human smuggling ring and holding those aliens for ransom has received one of the longest sentences ever imposed in U.S. District Court in Los Angeles related to human smuggling. Felipe Mendoza-Granados, 32, was sentenced yesterday by United States District Court Judge Audrey B. Collins to 40 years in prison.

Mendoza was one of five Mexican nationals convicted on federal hostage-taking and weapons charges in connection with an incident last year where the men abducted several illegal aliens from a human smuggling organization after beating the smugglers and threatening them with a gun and baseball bats. The case was investigated by agents with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

"This sentence sends a strong message that there is zero tolerance for the brutal tactics used by those in the human smuggling trade," said Kevin Jeffery, deputy special agent-in-charge for ICE investigations in Los Angeles. "ICE is working closely with the United States Attorney's Office to combat this ruthless enterprise and prosecute those involved to the fullest extent of the law."

According to court documents and evidence presented at Mendoza's trial, the men sent a confederate to Mexico, where he posed as someone who wanted to be smuggled into the United States. After arriving in Los Angeles with other illegal aliens, the man contacted his associates, ostensibly to pay his smuggling fee.

On February 11, 2004, Mendoza and his accomplices confronted the original smugglers in a supermarket parking lot. Brandishing a handgun and baseball bats, the men abducted three aliens, stole the smugglers' van, and forced the smugglers to drive to their drop house. At the house, the men beat the remaining alien smugglers, and then abducted the other illegal aliens. The hostages were driven to a new location where they were held for two days while being threatened with death or harm unless their relatives paid the balance of their smuggling fees.

The scheme ended February 13, 2004 when the California Highway Patrol stopped the stolen van and discovered two of the kidnappers and one illegal alien. Following their arrests, several of the defendants admitted that the gang had been involved in as many as 30 similar incidents. The other four defendants in the case are scheduled to be sentenced over the next six weeks.